Chrysalis

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Come Along With Me and Philosophical Theories

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Over the last sixty years, the world has become increasingly culturally diversified. This wave of racial, sexual, socio-economical, and religious progression has led to countless progressive movements and led to a complete overhaul of modern Western ideology. One , if not the most prominent, of the reasons this has occurred is the media, especially television. Movies, series, documentaries, and countless other forms of entertainment have brought queer and once unheard of ideas to the forefront of the world. A prominent example of media bringing these ideas to the forefront is Cartoon Network's original TV show, *Adventure Time*. *Adventure Time* follows a human boy named Finn and his magically-inclined dog in a world of whimsical characters and eccentric situations. The show also implicates itself in modern sociological issues and explores different philosophical ideas in hope to properly critique the convoluted

society that the show parallels. In *Adventure Time*, the melancholic and dark situations presented create characters that express popular moral and philosophical views relating to their truly absurd world, all of which can be applied to the historical and societal situations that the show represents.

Taking aim towards modern gender roles and androcentric features within society, *Adventure Time* encourages a hedonist lifestyle to combat modern patriarchal struggles. The entire Cartoon Network channel is infamous for its take on modern gender-specific portrayals; however, *Adventure Time* takes a much more philosophical approach – and in so a societal critique – in defining gender. In the parallel universe, in which all characters are their antithetical gender, the female version of Finn, Fionna, responds to her need for male validation by claiming that "I need to feel like I'm waiting to be noticed. I know who I am, and know what I want if and when it ever comes along" ("Adventure Time with Fionna and Cake"). Here, Fionna's take on society's propaganda towards femininity and the need for young girls to have validation through men shows how she is largely diverging from the norm. She has decided that instead of following the guidelines that have been placed upon her, she is taking a hedonistic approach by prioritizing her own pleasure. This directly relates to the modern feminist movement and the overarching theme of self-pleasure. Between sexual liberation, fresh faces, and just simply defying typical gender roles, the contemporary wave of feminism has been centered around a linear-hedonist path, with more and more self-pleasure becoming increasingly popular. Fionna's take is just one of the many examples of how *Adventure Time* takes a societal construction, in this case gender roles, and uses philosophical means to explore those situations.

Adventure Time continually promotes absurdist beliefs to assuage societal inadequacy. One of, if not the, most popular characters in *Adventure Time* is Jake the Dog. His constant nonchalant attitude towards the situation is best represented in the episode "Jake the Dog', where he finds himself becoming increasingly anxious concerning the future of his life with his non-binary robot friend, BMO. Jake's worry results in BMO claiming, "You won't be able to tell if everything is going to be totally haywire"("Jake the Dog."). Here, BMO takes an absurdist approach to looking at the world. BMO is essentially claiming that bad things will happen and there's nothing we can do about it. This lens is heavily reflective of the pessimistic-nihilistic-absurdist approach, in which it is imperative to recognize life has no meaning and we simply have no control over any of it. Instead of viewing this as a bad thing, he expresses the freedom of having no control over the events that occur. This philosophy can help ease some of the anxiety and deficiency that is felt within individuals towards society. One of the most prominent examples of this in contemporary society is the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. It was something *no one* could have predicted, so instead of self-blaming, a pessimistic-nihilistic-absurdist approach emphasizes the importance of knowing that the individual did nothing wrong, and the negative situation was bound to happen. BMO's response to Jake helps soothe his abrasive attitude towards negative events occurring within the society around him and further shows how *Adventure Time* uses dark situations to help emphasize important philosophical issues.

Similar to the approach towards societal adequacy, *Adventure Time* promotes tranquility towards social anxiety and advocates for a spontaneous life, directly contradicting society's approach towards investing in the future. Jake, being the essence of peace that he is, later reverses roles with BMO and takes another nihilistic-absurdist approach. When BMO feels anxious about his future and his standing in society, not being a human being, Jake brightly responds that "Everything ahead of us is totally unknown" ("Five More Short Graybles."). Here Jake points out that while the future may hold bad intentions and could be completely horrendous, it could also just be pretty great. In a collective, no one has control over what is going to happen. Through this lens it's important to see that investing in one's future to the point of contempt for one's own simple failings won't change anything. This complex yet truly freeing concept is installed in many forms in Jake's rhetoric towards this subject and helps to realize that the future is

completely unknown. And that's scary, but also exciting. This directly parallels the new wave of holistic wellness that has spread throughout the world. The entire "you only live once" (YOLO) movement has brought the living in the moment philosophy of optimistic nihilism to the forefront of contemporary society. While *Adventure Time* is just a small faction, it still is able to embed the core philosophical thinking into its viewers, aiding in the movement in soothing mass hysteria concerning the future. The series' approach towards this philosophical theory further proves that melancholic and societal situations that the show represents all can be connected with philosophy.

Contradicting the absurdist approach of the entire series, the ice king's rationalist views parallel that of a micro-analysis approach towards society, which becomes both his and society's downfall. The Ice King's entire character revolves around his ability to find the perfect wife in one of the many princesses within the series. His obsession with maximizing his success when it comes to something as unprecedented as love creates a significant philosophical dilemma within *Adventure Time*. Should one choose to accept faith or simply try to control it through making logical decisions? And, if we have to choose, does one philosophical theory trump the other? Simply, yes it does. The idea that all decisions and beliefs should be based on society's portrayal of what is and is not realistic, also known as rationalism, is simply a farce. *Adventure Time* displays this through the Ice King's mannerisms. When trying to choose which princess is the right one for him he claims that he is "collecting them all first to be sure [he] makes[s] the right choice" ("Prisoner of Love"). Here, his obsession and belief that he can optimize his chances of happiness by choosing what society has portrayed him to be looking for has driven him insane.

His entire plot line throughout the series shows his rapid progression into a deeper, darker form of insanity to the point where he simply has lost all control. This can also be seen in modern societies' approach to everything. As a collective, but especially in contemporary Western society, it is taught that one has to first know all the options, analyze the pros and cons of each choice, and then take action. This approach has led to the deteriorated way of living that has become the standard in the last couple of centuries. Instead of trusting instinct, or simply taking an absurdist approach and letting it be, it's become the standard to try and analyze everything to the point it consumes one's being as a whole. Ice King represents the toxic trait of rationalism that society has adopted and both are worse off because of it. Rationalism and society's approach to rationality is ,once again, an example of *Adventure Time's* bold take on critiquing society through philosophical means.

Further, the manner of which Princess Bubblegum governs analogizes Plato's approach towards democracy and draws attention towards the recent failures of American democracy. Princess Bubblegum is arguably the most controversial character in modern cartoon history. To provide pretext, she created an entire kingdom of subordinates, The Candy Kingdom, to ensure she'll never be lonely. She also purposely made them all incredibly idiotic compared to her high level of intelligence. Later, the series shows Bubblegum in the fight of her political life, in which she is being challenged to the throne by a man who identifies better with the masses. In response, to the complete absurdity of the entire process, she loudly proclaims "A monarch is not a democracy" ("Bonnie and Neddy."). Here Bubblegum illustrates something that society has been largely uncomfortable with: challenging democracy. Democracy is seen as one of the many crown jewels of human evolution, while it has led to a multitude of wars, economic crises, and the continuation of the status quo of class warfare and struggle. This is not the first time democracy has been scrutinized. One of the most famous philosophers, Plato, challenged the institution of democracy in his groundbreaking piece of work *The Republic.* Plato argued, in regards to who should govern, that "There will be no end to the troubles of states, or of humanity itself, till philosophers become kings in this world, or till those we now call kings and rulers really and truly become philosophers, and political power and philosophy thus come into the same hands" (Plato). He also argued that "Human behavior flows from three main sources: desire, emotion, and knowledge"

(Plato). Plato's entire argument here is essentially claiming that people who know how to run a government should do it. Those who are able to expand their knowledge and their mind and have as little emotion in decision making as possible can ensure the best course of action for society. While it seems he's taking a rational approach, he actually is implying that those who are inclined to thinking on a much more broad scale should follow their passion of thinking. He also argues that when letting the masses participate in choosing the world leaders it leads to unqualified individuals being in powerful positions. It is no coincidence that *Adventure Time* displays this philosophical theory in the current political climate. Princess Bubblegum watches in horror as an unqualified individual leads her kingdom into ruins, similar to how the past forty-five men (Grover Cleveland twice) have caused an abundance of destruction and have left society worse off during their tenure as President of the United States. The parallel between Plato and Bubblegum is probably one of the the most prominent examples of how *Adventure Time* dives deep into uncomfortable societal issues, to only re-approach them through a philosophical lens.

In conclusion, philosophy is a broad subject. With countless theories and theories that branch off of those theories there can never be a set of beliefs that can answer all of society's questions. However, just because something can not be answered does not mean you can not live in a philosophical manner. *Adventure Time* teaches us that society as a whole progresses to the ideal utopia, continually finding the philosophical methods that put people's well-being first. This method successfully combats society's attacks towards the individuals and so the next sixty years will reap more progression than the last.

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